

Crossing Lines

“Magnets” and Mobility among Southern Sudanese

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A final report of two assessment trips examining the impact and broader implications of a new teacher training center in the Kakuma refugee camps, Kenya

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I. INTRODUCTION: DO EDUCATION FACILITIES ATTRACT DISPLACED PEOPLE? THE CURRENT DEBATE

The question of whether education facilities attract displaced people, and whether this is a positive result, is subject to strong debate within the international humanitarian community. Some believe that schools and training centers in war and post-war situations can be overdeveloped. If some education facilities are demonstrably better than others in the area, the argument goes, they will constitute an unhelpful “magnet” or “pull factor” that can, for example, prevent refugees from repatriating to home communities that have poor or nonexistent education facilities. Others strongly disagree with this position, citing the fact that quality education is a right that all children are entitled to, and thus not something that should be limited in service to specific political objectives.

An example of this debate surfaced recently on the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) list-serve. One side warned of the “very real danger that refugee children will receive a level of educational services so very disproportionately far above what they might hope to receive back home that they will not wish to return [to their original homes], and [will] be trained in languages, skills or approaches that will encourage brain drain [from their country of origin] as a matter of obvious personal choice.” To most emergency educators, such an argument constitutes a threat to the moral legitimacy of humanitarian assistance programs, inspiring one expert to respond that “specialists responsible for refugee education programs should actively resist senior managers who seek to manipulate communities by diminishing access to and quality of education, to secure certain political outcomes such as rapid repatriation.”

One of the emergency situations that regularly surfaces in this debate is Sudan. Years of bitter and devastating warfare have demolished much of Southern Sudan, destroying communities and infrastructure, displacing more than 4.5 million people (Sudan has the largest displaced population in the world), and killing more than two million people. War has, in fact, besieged modern Sudan for much of its existence: the British colonial authorities actually handed over rule in Sudan in 1956 while a civil rebellion in the South was already underway. Post-independence Sudan has experienced only eleven years of relative peace. The current civil war between Northerners and Southerners began nineteen years ago, and education is among the sectors that, in most parts of the South, scarcely exist.¹

With people’s lives so endangered, Southern Sudanese have searched for places to find protection, a means of survival, and, if possible, access to services such as education and health. Over the years, education in refugee camps in other countries, Kenya and Uganda in particular, has achieved a reputation for reasonable quality and availability among Southern Sudanese. But of all the nearby refugee camp locations – not just Kenya and Uganda, but the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ethiopia as well – none has achieved the reputation of Kenya’s Kakuma Refugee Camps.

¹ Background information was gathered from *God, Oil, & Country: Changing the Logic of War in Sudan*, by John Prendergast, et al. Brussels: International Crisis Group Press, 2002.

Despite its well-known and quite considerable deprivations, Kakuma is renowned as a place of opportunity: the chances for obtaining free schooling, medical treatment, and, just maybe, resettlement to Europe, Australia, or, better yet, America, have made it famous among Southern Sudanese.

No better example of Kakuma’s perceived wonders exists than the spectacular story of Sudan’s “Lost Boys,” child soldiers driven by conflict from Sudan to Ethiopia, back to Sudan, until, finally, they entered Kenya and became founding members of Kakuma’s refugee camp complex in 1992. After the Lost Boys received protection, education, food, shelter, and health and other services from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and non-governmental organization (NGO) partner agencies in Kakuma for nearly a decade, a large number – the exact proportion remains hotly debated – received what some Southern Sudanese consider the biggest prize of all: resettlement to the United States. The Lost Boys may make for a good story in the American media, but they are an even bigger story for Southern Sudanese.

This report examines the character of Kakuma’s education offerings for Southern Sudanese. It will focus on whether the possibility that a new teacher training center (TTC) in Kakuma could undermine teacher training investments within Southern Sudan, but will also examine the broader context of this issue, both in terms of perceptions and realities.

II. BACKGROUND: WHY STUDY TEACHER TRAINING IN KAKUMA AND SOUTHERN SUDAN?

"Crossing Lines" is based on findings from two field research trips to East Africa. The first took place from May 26-June 6, 2002, when visits were made to Nairobi, Kenya and the Kakuma Refugee Camps. The second trip took place from July 17-August 2. It involved interviews and site visits in Nairobi and Lokichoggio, Kenya and to Eastern and Western Equatoria (the Narus and Yambio areas, respectively) in Southern Sudan (See map in Figure 1).

Interviews took place with officials from a range of organizations, including USAID, the State Department, UNHCR, UNICEF, CARE, Lutheran World Federation (LWF), International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Adventist Day Relief Agency (ADRA), Diocese of Torit (DOT), Don Bosco Mission, Jesuit Refugee Service, Comboni Brothers Mission, the IDEAS College in Yambio, the Teacher Training Center in Kakuma, and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). In Kakuma, Narus, and Yambio, teachers, students, school headmasters and deputy headmasters, police and other security personnel, and community leaders were also interviewed wherever possible. Interpreters were used when necessary, which turned out to be infrequently. Local transport was hired to drive from Lokichoggio to Narus. In Kakuma and Yambio, local transport was provided by LWF and UNICEF, respectively.

This assessment work arises from the development of a new teacher training center in Kakuma. USAID is about to commence the Sudan Basic Education Program, a \$20 million, five-year program aimed primarily at increasing access to education in Southern Sudan. The scope and breadth of this ambitious plan signals a turn away from relief-oriented education, which is generally aimed at equipping schools with sufficient facilities and materials, towards a much more comprehensive, development-oriented educational support. The core of the action plan is contained in what are termed three “Intermediate Results,” the first of which seeks to improve teacher education programs with a series of measures: strengthening local institution-building by helping to rehabilitate and develop four regional teacher training institutes owned and managed by Southern Sudanese; dramatically enhancing the number of trained women teachers; expanding in-service teacher education programming; achieving a southern Sudanese teacher certification system; and establishing partnerships between teacher training institutions in Uganda and Kenya and those emerging in southern Sudan. The second and third intermediate results seek to increase primary and secondary school capacities in

Figure 1. Map of Southern Sudan and Surrounding Areas



Map adapted from UNHCR.
Original map at www.reliefweb.int.

southern Sudan and improve non-formal education for out-of-school youth and adults.² With these plans in place, the emergence of a teacher training center aimed largely for Southern Sudanese refugees in the Kakuma refugee camps in Kenya became a matter of concern to USAID officials. This assessment arises primarily from that concern. Many Southern Sudanese know Kakuma as a site for available, stable, and, in the context of war and displacement in Southern Sudan, fairly good quality education.

Given Kakuma’s reputation for attracting Southern Sudanese to its educational facilities, the new teacher training center, it was premised, might attract Sudanese teachers to Kakuma as well, and, in the process, undermine USAID’s efforts to enhance teacher capacities within Southern Sudan. Moreover, USAID officials argued that a Kakuma teacher training center “crossed the line,” essentially transforming aid to Southern Sudanese refugees from temporary humanitarian support into a long-term investment in the refugees’ future outside of Sudan.

Without USAID’s knowledge, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration in the State Department (BPRM) supplied the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees with funds to initiate construction for the teacher training center in Kakuma. USAID officials’ concerns over teacher training support for Southern Sudanese thus surfaced, in part, from a parallel refugee camp effort by another U.S. Government branch, BPRM, that had not been coordinated with USAID’s plans for Southern Sudan.

This lack of coordination and information-sharing, it turns out, is part of a much larger problem. It appears that education activities involving Southern Sudanese living both inside Sudan and in countries neighboring Sudan have been poorly coordinated with each other. As will be explained shortly, basic knowledge of education activities for Sudanese in other places – including, often, what curriculum they might be using – is frequently either poor or nonexistent. Coordination between such efforts tends to be, at best, faint. Thus, and quite clearly, one of the constraints on this assessment is its limited context. Field research extended to only three primary sites: the Kakuma refugee camps, Yambio in Western Equatoria, and Narus in Eastern Equatoria. It was not possible to visit other significant research sites. Refugee camps in Uganda, for example, are also renowned for their education facilities (again, in comparison to those in Southern Sudan), and they are located much closer to the large area of stability in Southern Sudan (Western Equatoria and southern Bahr el Ghazal). Commuting between Uganda and Southern Sudan is widely known and thought to involve thousands of refugees based in Uganda. The

² A second Intermediate Result is to increase primary and secondary school capacities in southern Sudan through related means, including: rehabilitating up to 240 schools; procuring and effectively using learning materials in classrooms; enhancing school administration, supervision, and finance capacities; and developing and supporting strategies and programs for effectively improving the access, retention, and education of girls. The third Intermediate Result seeks to improve non-formal education for out-of-school youth and adults through a range of strategies, among them: developing literacy and vocational programs targeted at reaching as many as 20,000 out-of-school learners; and using distance education, including radio education, as a means for reaching youths and adults in remote areas or on the move and without access to schools.

Sudanese refugee population in Uganda, at 176,800, is two and a half times the size of those located in Kenya (69,800).³

This assessment was designed to answer the following four questions:

1. What are the factors that cause Southern Sudanese teachers to leave Southern Sudan for Kakuma, Kenya?
2. What are the factors that deter Southern Sudanese teachers from leaving Southern Sudan for Kakuma, Kenya?
3. Will an increase in the level of teacher training services provided in Kakuma, Kenya cause an increase in refugee flow out of stable areas of Southern Sudan?
4. How should USAID modify its teacher education activities in Sudan based on the effects of the Kakuma teacher training center?

To adequately understand and explain why Sudanese teachers do or do not migrate, and how teacher training services in different locations are or are not interrelated, three larger contextual concerns also need to be considered. These are:

- Understandings and misunderstandings about education for Sudanese;
- Examples of Sudanese education systems in different locations; and
- Motivations underlying why Sudanese migrate.

By including these larger issues in the investigation, certain important themes surfaced that are directly related to the capacities and movements of Sudanese, teachers among them. These include:

- Different perceptions of education among Sudanese and international actors;
- A lack of knowledge about and coordination between education programs; and
- A divergence of both educational offerings in general and teacher capabilities in specific in different locations.

To investigate these broader concerns and themes, supplementary questions were added to the above list after interviews with USAID officials in Nairobi and over the course of field research. Taken together, these concerns and themes address not only issues relating to teachers but also ways that education needs are assessed and addressed in a region plagued by war, instability, and crisis. These are among the issues discussed in the findings section.

After first addressing USAID's specific questions about teacher training investments, the concluding section addresses the implications of the report's findings from the

³ *Statistical Yearbook 2001: Refugees, Asylum-seekers, and Other Persons of Concern – Trends in Displacement, Protection, and Solutions*. Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2002 (October), p. 94.

perspective of institutional actors providing education services in crisis countries. It looks at the central issue underlying USAID's questions: that is, whether or when emergency education investments “cross the line” to become “pull factors” that draw forced migrants away from their homes and disrupt reconstruction efforts. This issue is controversial and the debate is longstanding. Analysis of the issue is intended to help explicate the problem and suggest a way forward.

III. FINDINGS: ISSUES RELATED TO MOBILITY IN SOUTHERN SUDAN

Findings from the field research are divided into four sections. The initial section examines the institutional orientations between those working with refugees and those working inside Sudan. The second section attempts to put Kakuma into context by comparing education and other conditions existing in the three primary sites visits: Kakuma, Narus, and Yambio. The third section examines problems arising from poor coordination and divergent educational programming existing in different Southern Sudanese communities. The section also includes a chart that illuminates the different education systems that have surfaced in East and West Equatoria in Southern Sudan, in addition to refugee camps in Kenya. The final findings section takes a careful look at the teacher training center in Kakuma, and compares it to one located in Yambio.

A. Institutions at Odds: Contrasting Perceptions

A striking aspect of the findings was the limited experience and understanding of the Sudanese situation that international agency officials had regarding opposite sides of the Kenya-Sudan border. With the exception of those USAID staff who worked with Food for Peace, few USAID officials had been to Kakuma refugee camp (I heard of only two), while few State Department officials involved with Southern Sudanese refugees had visited Southern Sudan. The result was a limited understanding of the activities, context, and concerns of those living and working on the opposite side of the border.

In addition, it was reported that no one from UNHCR’s Kenya Country Office had recently visited Southern Sudan. UNHCR officials in Kenya thus tended to receive information on Southern Sudan from Sudanese sources or UNHCR colleagues in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum. The significance of UNHCR’s lack of firsthand knowledge in Southern Sudan is underscored by its official repatriation policy, which calls for refugees electing to return to their homes to first go to Khartoum, the seat both of Sudan’s government and the forces that drove most Sudanese refugees into Kenya in the first place. Requiring refugees to return to Sudan via the stronghold of the enemy has made repatriation through official means virtually inconceivable for most Southern Sudanese refugees.

UNHCR and State Department perspectives of Southern Sudan emphasized the absence of peace in Southern Sudan and the dangers that Southern Sudanese still faced within their country. They were less well versed on activities in stable areas of Southern Sudan, some of which encompass large populations and geographic expanses. With USAID officials’ limited understanding of life in the Kakuma camps, some of the information that officials received about life for Southern Sudanese on the other side of the Kenya-Sudan border was, at times, only partly accurate.

The geographically limited experience of relief and development officials working with a war-affected population may be commonplace in the humanitarian world. But this generally runs counter to the experiences and perspectives of the war-affected

themselves, who traverse borders with regularity (in this and many other cases, male youth in particular) and regularly evaluate situations in the different places where Sudanese reside. Their perspective tends to be regional – a view based on where Sudanese live (in Sudan as well as in surrounding countries) – while agency officials tend to focus on areas of bureaucratic responsibility: in this case, either Sudanese in refugee camps (UNHCR, BPRM) or those living within Southern Sudan (USAID).

Kakuma refugee camp issues have thus been perceived differently by these agencies, in views summed up as follows:

- USAID officials tend to view the Kakuma refugee camps as having overdeveloped services, which help prevent the refugees’ return to Southern Sudan – one official referred to Kakuma as a “Club Med” for the Sudanese. The USAID view contains an implicit challenge to the Sudanese population’s refugee status, arguing that safe return to many parts of Southern Sudan is viable, realistic, and already underway. Officials consequently emphasize areas of fairly longstanding stability within Southern Sudan that are ready for development investment now. At the same time, their understanding of refugee protection issues may be inadequate.
- UNHCR and BPRM officials have a different view. They emphasize the dismal environment and quality of life in the Kakuma camps and the shortages of food and other essential supplies. Several officials felt that Kakuma resembled a prison, not a Club Med. They assert that the Sudanese in Kakuma are authentic refugees whose reservations against return are well justified. UNHCR and BPRM officials’ views of Southern Sudan are dominated by the presence of war, human rights abuses, and instability there. Many labeled more stable areas in Southern Sudan “pockets of peace” (a characterization that was particularly common with UNHCR officials), implying that these “pockets” are prone to further instability.

What emerges, then, are two sharply contrasting perspectives of Southern Sudan and the situation of Sudanese refugees in Kakuma by different international agencies.

B. Deprivation, Education, and Resettlement: Kakuma in Context

Kakuma

Given Kakuma’s reputation among some as a haven for good education and health services, it is nonetheless difficult to perceive the Kakuma refugee camps as attractive. Set in a scorching desert, the large camps are regularly beset with shortages of water and food. A particularly troubling food shortage currently confronts the refugee population. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) reports that severe malnutrition persists in the camps, with the food levels barely reaching, and increasingly falling below, the bare minimum standards for keeping sedentary people alive. Nearly half of all children under 5 there suffer from Vitamin A deficiency, while 61.3 percent of children under 5 are anemic. The endemic food shortages are made even more debilitating because the

generally youthful demographic in Kakuma means that nutritional needs increase as children and youths grow. But the reverse is too often the case: according to IRC, “there is no food in the pipeline for Kakuma for the rest of the year.” Sanitation, moreover, is seriously inadequate, housing is short, insecurity problems persist, and shortages of medicines and other basic supplies are commonplace.⁴

At the same time, the education (and health) facilities, compared to those in Southern Sudan, are exceptional. Accident victims can be medically evacuated to Nairobi. Health clinics, even if substandard, are at least available to most refugees.

But it is the education facilities that stand out – the wealth of educational and recreational activities for Kakuma’s children and youth is most probably unmatched by any other refugee camp on the continent, if not far beyond. There are 5,425 children (ages 3-6) in preschools, 20,322 students (ages 6-20) in primary schools, and 2,157 children (ages 16-25) in secondary schools. 568 students attend the Don Bosco vocational education center, which trains students in a variety of trades, including computer skills, mechanics and carpentry. A vocational training center has been opened for handicapped children, who also receive assistance to help them attend formal schools. FilmArt presents outdoor educational films to an average of 8,000 viewers per weekly presentation, in addition to teaching youths how to make their own videos. There is a community-based rehabilitation program that trains refugees in physical therapy, among other medical skills. The Lutheran World Federation is about to start an adult continuing education program. The sports program arranges for organized sports competitions for thousands of young refugees. The peace education program operates in primary schools and has reached many hundreds of adults. The youth program, featuring arts and drama activities, reaches up to 20,000 youths per year. The University of South Africa Distance Learning has 32 refugee students working towards degrees. The Jesuit Refugee Service awards scholarships to 115 refugees students per year, allowing them to attend Kenyan secondary schools. All this is offered to a population of less than 65,000 African refugees. Without question, Kakuma constitutes a rare and remarkable exception to the dangerous tendency to underinvest in education and related services for war-affected youth.

As will soon be described, nothing like this – nothing even close – is available in Southern Sudan (although, it must be pointed out, formal school facilities are also considerable for Sudanese refugees in northern Uganda). One reported fact underscores Kakuma’s prominence: more Southern Sudanese attend secondary school in the Kakuma refugee camps than in all secondary schools in Southern Sudan combined.⁵ Still, the profile of the average refugee in the Kakuma camps is probably as follows: a young Sudanese male who attends at least one education program – yet is hungry most of the time.

⁴ More information regarding IRC’s findings and perspectives on these and related issues can be found at http://www.senate.gov/~gov_affairs/060402phillips.pdf.

⁵ The same could probably be said if secondary schools in Ugandan refugee camps and settlements were compared to those in Southern Sudan. The difference is that the education offerings in one refugee camp complex in Kenya – Kakuma – are so highly concentrated.

While many have pointed to the array of education facilities, together with comparatively good health facilities, as Kakuma’s primary attraction for Southern Sudanese, the reality is more complicated. Most Sudanese have probably sought refuge in Kakuma because of war, instability, and fears of forced military recruitment taking place in their home areas in Sudan. There is also no doubt that some Sudanese are motivated to migrate to Kakuma to attend school in Kakuma, particularly if it may lead to a scholarship for tertiary education or resettlement, and examples of recent arrivals in Kakuma point to this.

At the same time, Kakuma has become perceived as a haven for resettlement to the West. Recent “processing” of refugees for resettlement to Australia reportedly attracted Southern Sudanese from Sudan as well as refugee camps in Uganda and Ethiopia. And it is clear that the resettlement of the “Lost Boys” to the U.S. has created a sensation among those youths remaining in Kakuma and Southern Sudanese elsewhere in the region. Rumors of Lost Boys sending back up to a million Kenyan Shillings (about US \$13,000) to pay bride prices were widespread. There’s also a story that one Lost Boy sent back 250,000 Kenyan Shillings (about US \$3,200) to be divided among his friends. Such rumors are bound to expand once the U.S. government institutes the processing for nearly 12,000 Somali Bantus in Kakuma, whose arrival from the refugee camps in Dadaab (in northeastern Kenya) incited considerable agitation and excitement in Kakuma and the surrounding area, and among Kenya politicians. One aid agency official worried that Kakuma may soon become known more of a “processing center for resettlement than a refugee camp.” For in terms of Kakuma’s attractions, the realities matter much less than perceptions of what is taking place. Education is clearly only one of several attractions that might draw Sudanese to Kakuma. Findings for this report strongly suggest that the possibility of resettlement, however unrealistic the chances may be, is the primary attraction of Kakuma for Southern Sudanese.

Narus

Many aid agency officials have noted that thousands of Southern Sudanese leave Kakuma camps for Southern Sudan, while hundreds if not thousands more arrive in Kakuma every year. Precise numbers of these arrivals and departures are hard to gather, because many reportedly do not register with UNHCR. UNHCR also questions whether Kakuma is much of a draw for Southern Sudanese at all, pointing to the reduction of Kakuma’s refugee population by 14,000 (discovered through a refugee re-registration process) in 2002.

Findings in Eastern Equatoria directly challenged this perspective. In the area of Narus in Eastern Equatoria, just north of Kakuma and the Kenya border, visits to Kakuma are so common that one veteran education official in Narus estimated that 75 percent of all students in the area had visited Kakuma at least once. A number of students, educators and local leaders indicated that the majority of students had attended school in Kakuma but later returned to attend school in their home country. “All Sudanese in this area have been to Kakuma at least once, and many have relatives there,” one official surmised.

Kakuma, in the collective view of those interviewed in the southeast corner of Sudan resembles a resource to be accessed more than just a refugee camp or a resettlement processing center. “Kakuma is becoming like a home to Sudanese,” one education leader observed. “Maybe three-fourths of the population (in the Narus area) have relatives in Kakuma.” Visits are necessary because “Here, food is not guaranteed, but in Kakuma, it is.” It was common to hear of people going to Kakuma “for R & R” or “to feast” after food distributions took place there – a dramatic shift in perspective from that suggested by officials and refugees in Kakuma. This does not mean that rations in Kakuma are sufficient – many Sudanese complained about the small size of rations in Kakuma. But for people on the move, who either commute across the border or have relatives and friends who do, there appear to be other ways to access food and resources. One young man, a secondary school student, related how he migrated to Kakuma at age 18. Once in Kakuma, however, he found the going rough: “I had so many problems there that I couldn’t go to school. You get very little food rations for 16 days. So a schoolboy can be hungry. Most become thieves [to survive].”

Clearly, not everyone is stuck in Kakuma. In addition to regular movements between Kakuma and Sudan, Uganda, and Ethiopia, Sudanese refugee communities were reported to be in a number of Kenyan towns: Lodwar, Kapenguria, Kitale, Kisumu, Nakuru, and Nairobi, which reportedly contains Kenya’s largest urban Sudanese refugee community.

Nearly all of this movement to and from Kakuma is technically illegal. Yet commuters to Kakuma from Eastern Equatoria described how easy it was to enter the camp complex. Kenya has no immigration post at the Nadapal border town: only the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) does. No Kenyans, in fact, reportedly reside at the border: it is peopled by ethnic Toposa and Dinka from Sudan. If Sudanese entering Kenya have sufficient Kenyan shillings to pay policemen at three roadblocks inside Kenya (between Lokichoggio and Kakuma), plus the fare for the bus between the two towns, it appears that most can pass to the refugee camps without difficulty. The approximate cost of this trip is somewhere around 1,000 Kenya shillings (USD\$ 13.15) each way. Youths can raise the cost of this money in Narus in various ways. For girls, brewing and selling beer is fairly lucrative, while boys can carry out roadwork for NGOs. In both cases, youths reported that they might make 100 shillings or more per day. As a result, visits to Kakuma on school vacations were common.

Most descriptions of commuting to Kakuma involved travel by road. One reported case did not. Farmers from the Didinga hills apparently traveled overland by night in armed groups. This was dangerous, since the interlopers could have been attacked not by Kenyan police but by roving bands of ethnic Turkana who lived in the area. But the Didinga farmers were carrying a lucrative crop with them – “chat” or “miraa,” a highland crop popular among Somalis as a stimulant – making the trip worth the risk. The Didinga traveled to Kakuma to sell their harvest to Somali refugees.

Once in Kakuma, there was so much to do. In addition to trade, one could visit friends and relatives, attend video parlors, or interact with people from other countries. People in Narus described Kakuma less as a refugee camp than a city. Despite Kakuma’s

deprivations, there were opportunities to learn about. For youth, the most attractive opportunities were chances for scholarships to other places for advanced learning, and resettlement. Unquestionably, the chance for resettlement was the strongest draw. They had heard that opportunities were available and, with some luck, a youth could get resettled. One vocational student who had lived in Kakuma for several years related how “My two brothers in Kakuma told me that the Americans came and said, ‘Let’s go [to America].’” Stories of the Lost Boys and their resettlement to the U.S. were well known. The Lost Boys were famous. For some, they represented the greatest example of success in Kakuma. As one education official observed, “Many Southern Sudanese think that America is Paradise, and who doesn’t want to go to Paradise?”

The diversity of attractions, opportunities, and challenges present in Kakuma altered the understanding of what a refugee was. A student in Narus maintained that he was also a refugee in Kakuma “because I have my [refugee ration] card from Kakuma.” His card provided more than simply food rations. It also awarded him a chance to access other opportunities as well. “I’ll go to Kakuma for the next school holidays,” the student continued, “and while I’m there, I’ll try for resettlement [to a European country of the U.S.].” Many students and adults supported the student’s definition of a refugee as a person having a refugee ration card, regardless of where that person resided. A Sudanese living in Kakuma without this ration card cannot be a refugee, according to this definition, because a person cannot access many available services without the ration card. As one Sudanese teacher termed it: “A refugee is someone who is catered to by UNHCR.”

If Kakuma is a magnet that attracts Sudanese interested in receiving education, then so is Narus. For many students in Narus, Kakuma was a place to visit but not to stay. As most had already been students in Kakuma, they considered the quality of education in the Narus schools to be much higher. The students in Kakuma were considered rough and “wild” and not particularly interested in education. School discipline was slight in Kakuma schools, many reported. This was not thought to be the case in the Narus schools, they said. Facilities were at least adequate, the teaching was thought to be good, and the distractions and difficulties found in Kakuma were not thought to be present in Narus. At the same time, many of the students in upper primary and secondary may not have been able to attend schools in Narus had they not first gone to Kakuma. Since Kakuma represented one of the few places where a student could complete primary and secondary school for people in the southeastern corner of Sudan, education facilities in Kakuma allowed many to qualify for school in Narus.

But the schools in the Narus area attracted people not just from Kakuma. The featured schools contained students from a diverse variety of Southern Sudanese locations. Out of 600 students at St. Bakhita Girls’ Primary School, for example, 150 were ethnic Lutuho, 146 were Dinka, 80 were Didinga, and only 74 were ethnic Toposa from the immediate area. There were also significant numbers of Nuba, whose original homes are far north, in the Nuba Hills. In most parts of Eastern Equatoria, no primary or secondary schools exist, making the few functioning schools exceedingly attractive to qualified students. The schools are also so few in number, and so well developed, that they have become

potential war targets: a distinctive difference separating schools in Narus from those visited in both Kakuma and Yambio was the presence of a series of bomb shelters in every school compound. Narus remains in an area near a war zone, and Government of Sudan’s notorious Antonov planes are still known to occasionally fly overhead, at which time everyone runs into the bomb shelters.

The dominant player in the very minimal provision of education there is the Diocese of Torit (DOT), which is based in Nairobi, Kenya. Faced with a vast need and limited resources, the DOT supports one primary school per parish area: one in Ikotos, one in Narus, one in the area of the ethnic Didinga, and so on. As a result, Lorema Primary School in the Didinga area is the only functioning school for that Parish. Before the current war, there were thirty-four functioning primary schools, a figure that does not include additional “bush schools” that operated “under the trees” instead of in school structures. Similarly, in the area known as the Central Deanery (Torit County), there were fifty schools during peacetime, and still more bush schools. Presently, the DOT has only one functioning primary school there.

In addition to the DOT, other Catholic organizations support schools. The Comboni Mission (from Italy) supports ten schools in the Narus area, creating, with DOT schools and a vocational education school, an area of concentrated education arguably rivaling nearby Kakuma in quality education (but not in the number of students involved). Only three of the eleven primary schools (St. Bakhita Girls’ in Narus, run by DOT; Comboni Boys’ in Narus and Lolim, both run by Comboni) extend across all grades. The other eight schools are smaller in size and range: most do not reach above Standard Three. Very few secondary schools exist in Eastern Equatoria – Narus’ St. Bakhita Girls’ is one. It is new, with 33 students (21 of which are boys). Narus also has a vocational training institute. Most students appear to receive at least partial support for attending school by the sponsoring institutions and their funders.

A second Catholic organization – the Jesuit Refugee Service – supports education in the western part of Eastern Equatoria, although exact details of their work there were unavailable (see the section on coordination below).

Yambio

Even though Yambio County is among the shining examples of a stable Sudan (Yambio hasn’t been bombed since 1995 and was “liberated” from Government of Sudan control in 1989), Yambio’s education situation is much more emblematic of Southern Sudan’s mostly appalling state of education than is Narus. While Narus represents an island of education opportunity for Southern Sudanese students, a look at UNICEF’s *School Baseline Assessment Report, Southern Sudan: May 2002*⁶ provides a sense of how very much needs to be done. Enrollment figures for primary school range between just under 40 percent in Bahr el Ghazal and (Eastern and Western) Equatoria to 23 percent in the Upper Nile. Of all pupils enrolled in primary school, just 12 percent are in grades 5-8. The highest number of students was in the first grade, but nearly half of that number was

⁶ *UNICEF Operations in Southern Sudan and the Africa Education Trust*. Nairobi: UNICEF, 2002.

likely to drop out before reaching the second grade. Only one percent of all students surveyed were studying in the eighth grade. Surveyed schools were open between one and ten months in the year. One student in four was female, and a mere seven percent of teachers were women. Forty-five percent of all teachers had received no training whatsoever, and only seven percent could be considered trained teachers. Nearly three-fourths of all schools had no latrines, and almost half had no safe source of drinking water. A great many schools teach students outdoors (in ‘bush schools’), and only 12 percent of all schools had buildings made of brick or concrete.

And so on. It is safe to say that generations of Southern Sudanese, on the whole, are growing up with little or no education to speak of. If the profile of a Kakuma refugee is a young man living on little food but attending at least one of a wide array of educational offerings, the profile of a child in Southern Sudan is one who has had between none and one year of education. It is a profound emergency that has recently attracted heightened attention among donor nations. The abysmal state of education in Southern Sudan naturally shapes perspectives. The view of Kakuma in Yambio was strikingly different from that in Narus. In Narus, Kakuma was a nearby and familiar destination; a resource, a city, a home where relatives live, a place for adventure, stimulation, and opportunity. If things got too bad there, you could leave. Receiving news and rumors from Kakuma was common. And together, Narus and Kakuma children and youth had access to education opportunities that were merely a dream for their counterparts in nearly all other parts of Southern Sudan.

Kakuma thus had a different sort of reputation in Yambio than in Narus, and one, it can reasonably be assumed, that is much more representative of people in Southern Sudan. Kakuma was far away, and difficult to get to: in the case of Western Equatoria, traveling to Uganda for school was much more realistic, and some made that journey. But Kakuma, with its combination of large-scale school facilities and a widespread reputation for resettling young Sudanese to the West (and the U.S. in particular), had a privileged place in the pantheon of locations promising opportunity. As a result, Kakuma symbolized the ‘brain drain’ problem plaguing reconstruction and development in Southern Sudan. As one education official in Yambio noted, “The problem is, there are no professionals here. They’re all outside of Sudan. If you go outside [of Sudan], you stay there. Few who go for education come back afterwards.” While some spoke with defiance and considerable pride about working inside Sudan and contributing to the construction of “New Sudan,” the envisioned new nation of the South, others spoke of Kakuma’s impact on Sudan with bitterness or resignation. The fact that international agencies provided superior education to Sudanese outside Sudan while most of Southern Sudan’s education system remained in shambles seemed palpably unfair. And yet they knew that people leaving Sudan for education and other opportunities were merely following the model established by Southern Sudanese elites. Nearly everyone who could send his or her children elsewhere for education, including major political leaders from Southern Sudan, did so. A lingering sentiment in Yambio, a place combining peace, stability, and mostly plentiful cropland with severely deprived education and other services, was one of being left behind.

Kakuma’s allure made sense when compared with the state of local education in Yambio, which was struggling along at a very low level of educational quality. Primary schools existed, but the quality of education was exceedingly poor. “The amount of hours that students spend in school is so low, and the quality of education is terrible, so the educational gain slight,” one education administrator explained. Another education expert shed light on the situation by examining how rarely children went to class. While the recommended number of school hours per year was 12,720, an expert estimated that most students attended Southern Sudanese schools for somewhere between a quarter and a third of the recommended hours. “This means that students in Kakuma receive three or four times the amount of actual classroom schooling than those in Sudan.” “This is the living condition,” the expert continued, “because teachers are not getting anything.”

Beyond the poor or nonexistent school facilities and few, if any, school supplies and textbooks, issues involving teachers were the most significant, and the most compelling contrast in Yambio to the education situation in Kakuma. In most of Southern Sudan, government officials receive little or no salary. Taxes are sporadically collected, and much of what is received are in-kind payments (usually crops or livestock). Teachers are paid up to the equivalent of USD \$10 every three months, but sometimes nothing at all. Nonetheless, teaching has its benefits. The list drawn from education experts in Yambio was significant. Teachers can’t be conscripted into the army. Being a teacher confirms a person’s status as a professional. Teachers may get just a bit of money every month. They may have access to crop yields in school gardens. They also are not obligated to teach very much: perhaps a few classes a week on a subject or two. Missing classes has no repercussions since a school headmaster can’t sack anyone. As one expert observed, “When you don’t pay somebody, you don’t have any control over them.”

Finally, teachers can qualify for a range of training opportunities. Teacher training is thought to be practically the only available opportunity for professional improvement. This makes trainings popular, but it does not necessarily mean that graduates from training programs intend to return to teaching – teacher training is viewed as a means for advancing one’s career by leaving the profession. A teacher training certificate constitutes a record of professional accomplishment, which may help a person find a paying job. As a result, teacher training prepares trainees, at least in principle (jobs being hard to come by), to leave the teaching profession.

The primary challenge in training teachers is their low level of qualification. Some primary school teachers may have finished primary school, while others may not have. Training people with minimal education experience themselves is “like handling a baby,” one training coordinator observed. “You have to teach them everything.” Teachers normally have to learn a subject before learning how to teach it. The process is long, arduous, and calls for considerable patience and investment to markedly improve a teacher’s capabilities. The training work carried by organizations such as the Adventist Day Relief Agency (ADRA), UNICEF, and the local Catholic Diocese in Yambio, in addition to the IDEAS College (see below), is impressive.

None of the above description of the benefits of teaching in most of Southern Sudan has anything to do with teaching itself, and it is yet another indicator of how low the quality of education actually is. Some children are sometimes in school, educators in Yambio related. But what learning they take away from their school experience may be negligible. The challenge of preparing teachers to teach, and insuring that they remain as teachers, may be the largest challenge that USAID, its partners in the Sudan Basic Education Program, and others striving to improve education in Southern Sudan currently face.

C. Teachers and Curricula: Coordination Challenges

One of the most startling findings arising from this fieldwork was the generally low level of coordination and information-sharing between those working on education for the Sudanese. Quite simply, very few of those interviewed seemed to know much of anything about education activities taking place for Southern Sudanese in other parts of Sudan or in the nearby refugee asylum countries. The implications of this deficiency are serious.⁷ Only those involved with UNICEF’s baseline study (see above) and SPLM officials involved with education seemed to have details about more than a few education efforts for Southern Sudanese.

Throughout the trip, Southern Sudanese and foreign education professionals were naturally very interested in knowing about differences in education policy, approach and availability in Sudan and in refugee camps in Uganda and Kenya. Education officials working with Sudanese refugees in Kakuma, for example, had only a hazy understanding of where education was taking place inside Sudan, which organizations were involved, what the teacher incentive ranges were, or what curriculum they were using. As with other sites visited, the focus of and rationale for education extended only to the specific area for which they were responsible: refugees in Kakuma, Sudanese served by the Diocese of Torit and the Comboni Mission, and so on. The details of Narus’ impressive education programming, for example, including the fact that the incentives they offered were significantly higher than any other site visited or mentioned, were not well known among international organizations (although, as mentioned above, Sudanese in Kakuma and Narus alike were very aware of the education offerings in both places). The same could be said for most organizations in the region working on education for Sudanese.

Education systems for Southern Sudanese may use a variety of different curricula, although the New Sudan, Ugandan and Kenyan curricula, or sometimes a mixture of two or even all three of the above, are the most common.⁸ There was much discussion among Sudanese and foreign education officials about the strengths and weaknesses of the various curricula. Those using the Kenyan or Ugandan curriculum were involved in education inside those countries or in locales just inside Sudan. Students in Narus, for example, study the Kenya curriculum and then sit for primary school examinations in Lodwar, Kenya. In areas where the Kenyan curriculum is used (such as Bor County,

⁷ The subject will be further addressed in the recommendations section.

⁸ The curriculum issue was not covered in UNICEF’s *School Baseline Assessment Report Southern Sudan: May 2002*.

Kapoeta, Narus, and Kakuma), it is preferred because it is “internationally recognized,” and constitutes a complete, cohesive curriculum (the international recognition issue is especially important for those striving to qualify for scholarships abroad and resettlement to the West). Similar comments were received about those using the Uganda curriculum. Areas using the New Sudan Curriculum (SPLM),⁹ such as in Yambio, were well aware that their curriculum (developed by Sudanese education professionals in Nairobi) was a work in progress and as yet lacked international recognition. Indeed, it is likely that those currently using the Kenyan and Ugandan curricula will be reluctant to switch to the New Sudan Curriculum in the near future, given the perceived benefits that the two foreign curricula promise to provide. The complete New Sudan primary curriculum and textbooks are not expected to be completed until the end of 2002. Educators in Sudan currently borrow curriculum materials and textbooks from Uganda and Kenya to fill in the gaps, although some considered Kenya’s national curriculum and textbooks to be superior to Uganda’s.

Teacher “incentives” are wildly out of synch – from next to nothing in Yambio and other areas of Southern Sudan to as much as 8,000 Kenyan shillings (USD \$105) for trained secondary school teachers in Narus. Since it is an issue that virtually every teacher interviewed, and most education system officials, mentioned during interviews, a word on incentives is useful. None of the sites visited offered teacher salaries: only “incentives,” considered something less than, and of a much less stable quality, than a salary. Incentives, as a rule, appear to have been accepted by international agencies and local authorities alike because, to date, few Southern Sudanese in the military or civilian offices are receiving payment. Thus, the thinking goes, if soldiers in the military and officials in the local government aren’t paid, how can teacher salaries be justified? Most teachers and education administrators interviewed strongly disagreed with this rationale – they wanted to get paid better and more regularly for the work they performed. They are also keenly aware that the foreign personnel involved in Sudanese education, and Sudanese working with them, receive, in the eyes of teachers, excellent salary packages.

The chart in Figure 2 provides some general information about education systems for Southern Sudanese in Equatoria, Kenya, and Uganda. The chart is incomplete, as it contains only information obtained during interviews with government, United Nations, and NGO education officials during the field research. Although efforts were made to confirm information gained from one official with other officials, sources of precise data for some areas were hard to come by.

⁹ Also known as the New Southern Curriculum.

Figure 2. Available Information on Education Systems for Southern Sudanese

Location	Teacher Incentive Range	Curricula Used	Where Students Sit for Exams	Primary Supporting Institutions
Tambura County	Not known; probably very low	New Sudan Central Africa Republic (along border).	For New Sudan Curriculum: Yambio	None
Yambio County	Very low	New Sudan	Yambio	None
Maridi area	Not known; probably very low	Ugandan	New Sudan Exams	International Aid Sweden
Mundri area	Not known; probably very low	New Sudan	Some sit in Yei	None
Yei area	Not known; probably very low	Uganda	Adjumani, Uganda	Assumed none
Kajo Keji area	Not known; probably very low	Uganda	Moyo, Uganda	International Aid Sweden Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Humanitarian Assistance for Southern Sudan (HASS)
Nimule area	Not known; probably very low	Uganda	Adjumani, Uganda	JRS
Labone, Western Torit	Not known; probably very low.	Uganda	Kitgum, Uganda	JRS
Bor County	3,000 Kenyan shs. (USD \$39)/mo. for teachers; 4,500 Kenyan shs. (USD \$59) for headmasters (salaries designed to match those in Kakuma Refugee Camps), plus other benefits	Kenya	To be addressed in later years	Church Ecumenical Action in Sudan (CEAS)
Kapoeta area Narus area	Primary school teachers: untrained 3,000-4,000 Kenya shs. (USD \$39-\$52), trained 5,000 Kenya shs. (USD \$66);	Kenya	Lodwar, Kenya	Diocese of Torit (DOT), Comboni Mission

	headmasters 3,500 Kenya shs. (USD \$46) or 8,000 Kenya shs. (USD \$105). Secondary School teachers: 6,000-8,000 Kenya shs. (USD \$79-\$105), headmasters 8,500 Kenya shs. (USD \$111). All also receive other benefits.			
Kakuma Refugee Camps	3,000 Kenyan shs. (USD \$39)/mo. for teachers; 4,500 Kenyan shs. (USD \$59) for headmasters	Kenya	Lodwar, Kenya	UNHCR Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

D. Two Teacher Training Centers: A Contrast

Some debate exists over whether the new teacher training facility in Kakuma should be called a center or a college. USAID officials suggest that it is a college, and point to the considerable size of the site (while most of it is empty, the site delineated by the fencing is several acres). Those who are involved in its development (BPRM, UNHCR, and the Lutheran World Federation, or LWF, which is managing refugee education in Kakuma), on the other hand, maintain that it is a center.

In the end, the debate seems mostly beside the point: although the “center” does not have dormitory and dining facilities (such as a Kenya teacher training college), the aim is the same: to prepare teachers for certification in the Kenyan national education system. This goal underscores how the Kenyan education system remains the frame of reference of those involved with refugees, while USAID is focused on the various education systems within Southern Sudan.

Restrictions on qualifications for becoming a school teacher in Kakuma are so much higher than in the Sudan – one needs only a primary school certificate to be able to teach primary school inside most of Southern Sudan (sometimes even less), while Kakuma and the Narus area in Sudan require a secondary school certificate – that it is unlikely that teachers would journey from many places in Southern Sudan to become teachers in Kakuma. Moreover, refugee and aid agency officials state that only those teachers already on staff in Kakuma who have experience and promise will be selected to attend the teacher training center.

Few international officials or Sudanese inside Sudan knew about Kakuma’s TTC, even in nearby Narus. The TTC is too new. Moreover, teachers were not thought to be as mobile as students, so it seemed unlikely that teachers would attempt to enter Kakuma to attend the TTC. Given the restrictions, it appeared unlikely that, should teachers from Sudan

attempt to register for Kakuma’s TTC, they would be admitted. Few would be qualified to teach in the Kakuma schools in any case.

At the same time, teachers trained at the Kakuma TTC may be attracted to teach in Narus, where teacher incentives are higher than those in Kakuma (indeed, they appear to be higher than those offered to Southern Sudanese teachers anywhere else in the region). Presently, most teachers in Comboni and DOT-supported schools in the Narus area are Kenyans. The reason given was that most available trained teachers were from Kenya, and trained teachers promised to increase the quality of education. In addition, Kenyan teachers were best qualified to teach Kenya-specific subjects such as Swahili (the Narus schools all use Kenya’s national curriculum).

The most significant response from educators in Yambio, after learning about the TTC in Kakuma, was that it signified another example of donors supporting Sudanese outside the country instead of those within Sudan. Yambio, a stable area surrounded by civil war, has been tabbed the “Holiday Inn” by some UN officials involved with Operation Lifeline Sudan, as it compares favorably to the many unstable areas of Southern Sudan. Nonetheless, development investment remains low. People in Yambio consequently feel unjustly overlooked. “It’s possible that most people going to Kakuma will never come back,” one Sudanese official based in Yambio lamented. “The TTC defeats the whole idea of donating money to help people within Southern Sudan.”

While Kakuma’s TTC aims to certify refugee (and, reportedly, some Kenyan) teachers, the ambitions and expectations of the Distance Teacher Education Unit (DTEU) at the Institute of Development, Environment, and Agricultural Studies (IDEAS) in Yambio (there is another IDEAS annex located in Rumbek, in Southern Bahr el Ghazal) are necessarily much lower. Although the aim of the IDEAS effort is to develop an accredited teacher education program, the capabilities of the teachers involved are much lower than those who will attend Kakuma’s TTC. An entry exam has been developed to establish whether the teachers qualify, as many lack sufficient literacy and numeracy skills to be able to participate. The DTEU has an accomplished team of Sudanese and Australian experts (the Australians are supported through UNICEF’s local office). The system they have developed is sophisticated and, through thoroughgoing testing and modification, applicable to the limited skill range of their teacher trainees. The program, in other words, has tremendous potential. Still in the start-up phase, the DTEU is unfortunately plagued by financial difficulties and alleged mismanagement at the level of the IDEAS administration. Part of USAID’s Sudan Basic Education Program is to support and help develop the DTEU at IDEAS in both Yambio and Rumbek.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

A. Factors That Encourage Teachers to Leave or Stay in Southern Sudan

There appear to be few factors that might cause Southern Sudanese teachers to leave Southern Sudan for Kakuma, Kenya, with the exception of visiting relatives or going for “R&R” (rest and relaxation). The reason chiefly boils down to the fact that most Southern Sudanese teachers with the necessary qualifications to enter the Kakuma TTC either no longer reside in Southern Sudan or no longer work as teachers. Managing to get into the Kakuma refugee education system and qualify for entrance into the TTC appears to be difficult but probably not impossible. It seems much more likely that Southern Sudanese teachers would attempt to enter the Kakuma school system and TTC from refugee camps in Uganda, since education standards there are generally far higher than in Southern Sudan. It also seems likely that some Kakuma TTC graduates will apply for teaching jobs in Narus, given the high level of teacher incentive offered there.

A second deterrence that would seem to limit Southern Sudanese teachers from entering Kakuma is distance. Kakuma is difficult to get to from the western and northern sections of Southern Sudan. It is relatively easy to get to from Eastern Equatoria and Bor County, but, as stated earlier, Southern Sudanese are more likely to visit Kakuma in search of an education or resettlement opportunity than to sneak into the refugee teaching corps.

A third deterrence is that Kakuma appears to be more popular from afar. Kakuma’s fabled opportunities – scholarships, health services, and resettlement – seem more appealing when the hardships of food and personal insecurity are not taken into account. Commuters from the Narus area have developed realistic assessments of Kakuma’s strengths and weaknesses, and work out strategies to access opportunities in Kakuma while limiting risk. Gaining a scholarship or resettlement may require a lengthy stay, and some are not willing to do so. On the other hand, going to Kakuma to get several years of education may seem worthwhile. In any case, short visits are always a possibility. For those in Eastern Equatoria and beyond, Kakuma is arguably the most interesting place around.

A fourth deterrence is that Kakuma has competition. Even if the refugee camps in Uganda lack their own TTC, training opportunities of some sort may well be available for the refugee teaching corps in Uganda. The level of commuting to Uganda is as significant as the traffic to and from Kakuma. It may be much more so, given the much larger refugee community living there. Nineteen years is more than enough time for Southern Sudanese to develop all sorts of strategies for investigating and accessing opportunities in refugee areas.

As a result of these factors, it is unlikely that the level of teacher training services provided in Kakuma will generate an increase in refugee flow out of stable areas of Southern Sudan. At the same time, it remains the case that teacher training opportunities available within Kakuma are not directly intended to inspire or support a return to Sudan.

The apparatus surrounding education and other benefits in Kakuma (resettlement in particular) has been constructed on the assumption that formal refugee repatriation to Sudan remains years or decades away. Education officials in Kakuma – both refugee and foreign – stated this in clear terms: they sought to prepare young Sudanese refugees for opportunities wherever they may go in the future. Sudan was one destination, but so was residence in other countries, and the chance for resettlement turned much of the refugee community away from Sudan. As one Sudanese refugee leader commented,

People here have lost hope, as there’s no end to war [in Sudan]. So we welcome resettlement to Australia, Canada, and America. Planning to go back is ruined by war. The war is endless. So we try to counsel Sudanese youths to go for resettlement, and then come back [to Sudan] after the war ends, to help rebuild it.

UNHCR’s stance on repatriation to Sudan, together with the population’s intense focus on limited chances for resettlement (the cherished goal) and academic scholarships (useful, but definitely the second best option), support the advice that refugee elders provide: move out of the region if at all possible, and if not, seek opportunities that increase your skills and educational experience.

Although this perspective is quite reasonable, given the circumstances, it does not describe the entire situation in Kakuma. It is also the case that many youths in Kakuma would prefer to resettle than repatriate, particularly given that formal repatriation with UNHCR’s assistance has not, to date, been a viable option. War, fears of forced military recruitment and slavery are, of course, very real and important concerns, but much more so for some areas of Southern Sudan than others. Earlier this year, for example, IDPs in Eastern Equatoria returned to their Bor County homes. Some informal repatriation from Kakuma probably took place, in addition to the well-known (in Kakuma) return of 33 refugee teachers who were flown back to Bor County by CEAS. But formal repatriation of refugees from Kakuma to Bor County did not occur.

In addition, over representing a refugee’s dismal circumstance in Kakuma serves both to potentially enhance their chances of qualifying for scholarships and resettlement as well as shielding any illegal movements into Sudan. Similar to the case for refugees residing in encampments all over the world, some refugees are trapped in Kakuma. Others are not.

B. Addressing the “Education as Pull Factor” Issue: A Broader Perspective

UNHCR has been criticized for not adequately carrying out its responsibilities in a number of countries and contexts. The source of some of this criticism has come from UNHCR officials themselves.

Curiously, in the debate over whether refugee education constitutes a “magnet” or “pull factor” that exacerbates humanitarian work, UNHCR and its partners are effectively being criticized for doing their job too well. The argument is significant, but perhaps not in all the ways that its proponents may have hoped, for it exposes serious problems in the way that education is delivered to war-affected people. If “good” schools become

magnets, the responsibility (or commendation) is not just UNHCR’s – it rests with the entire international humanitarian community, and how it chooses to support, or not support, education in situations of crisis.

For many in the humanitarian community, particularly those working within war-torn countries, there remains a strong tendency to criticize UNHCR and others working with refugees for, in effect, ‘overinvesting’ in education. In fact, UNHCR has a mandate to protect and assist refugees, and providing education to refugees is part of that mandate. In this regard, UNHCR’s work, and the efforts of its partners and funders, still have a lot of work to do: the agency’s own statistics suggest that a significant percentage of refugee children in their care have yet to attend school.

But the judgment of ‘overinvestment’ in refugee education is mostly unfair. It is much easier to provide education in refugee camps than war zones. Since schools are common war targets, and students and teachers represent excellent potential manpower (and childpower) sources for supporting military efforts, disproportionately investing in education services in safe areas is a natural and entirely appropriate response. But while not all displaced people in the region will have access to these services, the impact of such investments is also disproportionate: education in war-affected areas unintentionally but effectively supports the creation of new social dividing lines in war-affected nations. Quite simply, some forced migrants are less unfortunate than others.

There are ways to limit the disproportionate availability of education to forced migrants, but many of the solutions lead to issues that humanitarians and their supporters (governments in particular) have been, in general, less than enthusiastic about addressing. Beyond the essential complications and dangers of delivering humanitarian aid in war-affected areas, there are two prominent issues usually left unresolved which will be discussed here.

Coordination and Responsibility

There is no reason why, in principle, many Southern Sudanese, IDPs as well as those living in their homes, could not have received an equivalent level of education that refugees received in Kakuma and other refugee camps. But there are a lot of reasons why this did not occur, most of which might be considered humanitarian limits on humanitarian work.

First, while forced migrants view their situation in regional terms, the operations of humanitarian institutions do not: UNHCR, for example, is responsible only for refugees (in most situations), while USAID is responsible for people living within particular countries. The disjuncture between institutional responsibilities and realities is significant, because war forces people to expand community, ethnic, regional, and national identities across numerous international borders.

Accordingly, while displaced communities are forced to adjust their ideas about identity and relationships, humanitarians and governments are often slow to follow suit. Borders

matter to international institutions and governments. During wars, they matter even more, since sovereignty issues are at stake. But for people forced from their homes during wars, borders matter less and less. What matters is survival, and where the best chances exist for protection and opportunity. And so it is agencies and governments who care about where lines are crossed – be they borders, a certain level of investment for refugee education, or other issues – not forced migrants.

Once some stability in the forced migrants’ home country, or the prospect of peace and repatriation looms (as is beginning to occur for Sudan), investment in education and other sectors becomes significant: what is to be done for a person venturing from stability and resource to, potentially, devastation and landmines? It is at this point where the lack of prior coordination between humanitarians surfaces as philosophical conflict. Instead of realizing that coordination between agencies and governments working on opposite sides of borders has been insufficient, some of those working within the war-torn country view “good” refugee schools (or any refugee schools, in some cases) as threats to repatriation. They may also fail to realize that “magnets” can move – schools can be shifted from camps to communities.

Second, no United Nations agency has a formal mandate to protect and assist IDPs. Responsibility is still accorded on a case-by-case basis, even though far more IDPs exist than refugees, with Sudan being the world’s best example of this phenomenon. As a result, although UNICEF normally provides basic education in war-torn countries, there is no institutional corollary to UNHCR’s specific mandate to provide education for refugees that would apply to IDPs.¹⁰

Third, levels of coordination between those working within countries at war and those in refugee asylum countries nearby are frequently inadequate. UNHCR’s low levels of information about and experience in Southern Sudan is a prominent example of this problem. At the same time, USAID’s limited first-hand knowledge about the lives of Southern Sudanese refugees represents a shortfall in information that this report will hopefully begin to address. Similarly, coordination between humanitarian agencies and both recognized and de facto governments in war zones is quite often inadequate.¹¹

Investment

If refugees in camps tend to have access to higher quality schooling (or, in many cases, any education at all), a primary reason is that the level of per capital investment may be much higher. The reasons for this are complex and involve a number of issues, including bureaucratic responsibility, the frequently higher numbers of IDPs than refugees in a particular context (including Sudan), the dangers of attempting to access displaced

¹⁰ While the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement are an essential and vital set of instruments for aiding and protecting IDPs, they have yet to inspire specific institutional responsibility for IDPs within the United Nations system.

¹¹ A more extensive examination on humanitarian coordination issues by the author, including those pertaining to education (in Chapter Five), can be found in *The Dynamics of Coordination*, Occasional Paper No. 40, Humanitarianism and War Project, Brown University, 2000.

persons in war zones, concern over whether investment in education in a war-torn country may inspire combatants to use school facilities for military purposes, and, in some cases, a hesitance towards working with education ministries whose governments are considered either uncaring or corrupt, or a combination of the two.

None of these reasons, however, appear to justify years of overlooking investments in education in situations of long-term stability such as Western Equatoria (including Yambio) and Southern Bahr el Ghazal. USAID’s Sudan Basic Education Program is to be commended, in addition to the work of many others. At the same time, the scale of work that is needed, particularly in light of decades of neglect, means that considerably more investment will be required from the donor community to reverse the extraordinarily poor state of education in Southern Sudan.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS: COORDINATION, FORESIGHT, AND RESPONSIBILITY

This report is being written while early, unsteady steps towards peace in Sudan have already been taken. The following is thus written with a (hopeful) eye towards the possibility that peace, stability and refugee repatriation will have a chance to take place in Sudan in the relatively near future.

Research findings strongly suggest that the teacher training component of USAID’s Sudan Basic Education Program promises to make an important contribution to building teacher capacities in Southern Sudan. The proposed work is important and the need is great. The primary way that USAID could effectively modify its teacher education activities in Sudan to enhance teacher capacities and Sudanese education, based on the effects and implications arising from the Kakuma teacher training center, is to work to improve coordination and information-sharing with other actors involved in providing education to Southern Sudanese. This constitutes the only alteration to the Sudan Basic Education Program that is recommended in this report.

Adequately addressing this recommendation, however, promises to greatly enhance the equity and access of education for Southern Sudanese. Coordinating programming and sharing information – in addition to addressing the massive investment needs in the education sector in Southern Sudan – stand as the most significant concerns for improving education for Southern Sudanese. The need for heightened investment for education in Southern Sudan is clear, and most certainly should involve support for teacher training in addition to USAID’s investment. New investments should also be coordinated with existing ones, something that has not happened often enough.

Regarding improving coordination and information-sharing, it is recommended that a number of steps be taken:

- UNHCR, USAID, and others working with Southern Sudanese in Sudan and refugee asylum countries need to enhance their coordination and information-sharing efforts. These efforts should be informed by consultations with local and regional Sudanese (de facto) government officials. Agencies working with refugees appear to be, in general, poorly prepared for the prospect of peace in Sudan. At the same time, questioning whether all Sudanese in Kakuma and other refugee camps are refugees must be done carefully, even though it is doubtful that all Sudanese in Kakuma could be categorized as refugees. A UNHCR official asked, “Can it be refuted that there is a genuine refugee element in Kakuma?” The answer is certainly not, but the proportion of genuine refugees is entirely unclear, and the practice of commuting between Kakuma and other locations, among other movements, challenges both the actual length and regularity of residence of some Sudanese in Kakuma.

- It would appear necessary for UNHCR to establish a way of learning who in their community are refugees and who may not be. Repeated assurances from the SPLM that any returnees from Kakuma and other refugee areas will not be forced to serve in the military may be required. This issue is complex, and involves a number of concerns, including UNHCR’s towering responsibility to protect refugees and the fact that half of all Sudanese refugees in Kakuma were born there. At the same time, a promising practical starting point is to identify exactly where Sudanese refugees come from; to learn whether refugees originate from areas of continued instability or stability, and further investigate who may simply be commuters.
- To help make this happen, however, and in light of the prospect of peace in Sudan on the horizon, efforts to resettle Sudanese from Kakuma and other refugee locations to a third country should probably be delayed. Otherwise, refugees may have nothing to gain by relating precisely where they come from. If it will better serve their interest in resettlement to state that they come from an area of continuing instability rather than admit that their home area is stable, then gathering accurate information on refugee origins will be difficult and policies that appear to be contradictory – perceptions that resettlement and repatriation are both available – may continue to confuse refugees.
- Strong coordination, information-sharing, and policy alignment on education issues for Southern Sudan all require dramatic improvement. Education officials from the refugee asylum areas, such as UNHCR, JRS, and LWF, need to align programming with colleagues working across the Sudan border. It should also be investigated whether some of the investment for education programming in Kakuma and Uganda could be better used for education in stable areas of Sudan. Such efforts to adjust and align programming, however, may only work well if donors insist that they take place.
- To facilitate this process, it is recommended that UNHCR and BPRM officials begin regular visits to Southern Sudan. USAID officials have already indicated their interest in accompanying them on initial visits. This is a promising offer, and it should be reciprocated with regular visits by USAID and other major donors to refugee encampments like Kakuma and those in Uganda. Such visits should naturally be tied to understanding repatriation as well as education and other sector issues.
- The curriculum conundrum must, at some point, be addressed. In the long term, it does not help Southern Sudanese development efforts if students learn from one of a series of disparate curricula. Learning the geographies, histories and languages pertinent to asylum countries instead of Sudan will continue to separate Sudanese refugee futures from their country of origin. The policies supporting “education for integration,” which is longstanding in Kenya and Uganda (where it has been an explicit policy goal), need to be carefully reconsidered, particularly as the Sudanese peace process, again hopefully, progresses.

- Findings arising from discussions with Sudanese education professionals in Yambio pertaining to concerns over being overlooked, avoided, or disrespected by international agencies need to be addressed. Considerable resentment was recorded over issues of foreign personnel having little regard for Sudanese roles in and responsibilities for developing education in Yambio County and beyond. As one Sudanese education official summed up, “We are mad.” Improving these relations, and regularly sharing important information in the form of briefings and hard copies of relevant reports with Sudanese education officials in Sudan and asylum countries, is recommended. In addition, there was criticism regarding policies such as the decision of the DOT, based in Nairobi, to hire mainly Kenyan teachers to work in Eastern Equatoria schools. Education officials in Yambio expressed a suspicion that qualified Sudanese teachers may be overlooked in favor of Kenyans. Whether this critique is justified is not clear, but the perceptions of what may be taking place matter a great deal. The matter should be looked into.
- Finally, research for this report suggests that coordination, information-sharing, and mutual understanding of the policy priorities and principles of BPRM in the State Department and USAID could be improved. It is thus recommended that a focused report on coordination issues as they pertain to BPRM and USAID’s mutual and separate efforts in the education in crisis situations arena. The proposed exercise would be aimed at improving inter-agency relations and enhancing coordination for policies involving U.S. support for citizens from the same war-torn country. While the case of training Sudanese teachers is instructive, other potential cases should also be researched.

In addition, the continuation of this study into other places where Sudanese reside in the region, already under discussion, should be carried out, in part as a means for deepening research on this important issue. Once the inter-agency coordination study is completed, a workshop and other means of sharing and discussing findings with BPRM and USAID officials should be considered.